

LETTERS FROM THE WILDERNESS

BY

KATHLEEN L. MURRAY



Gold, and pink, and silver,
Noonday, sundown and dew,
Rosemary for remembrance
And one bitter plant of rue,
And why there was rue in remem-
brance,
Only the woman knew.

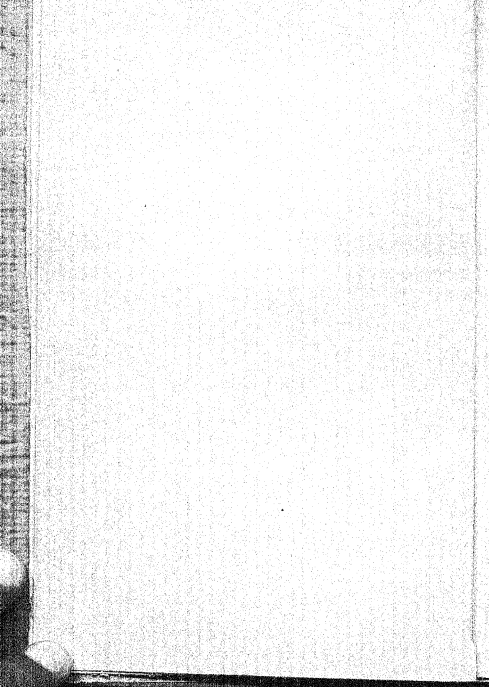


1913

CALCUTTA : THACKER, SPINK AND CO

LONDON : W. THACKER AND CO., 2, CREED LANE, E.C.

These letters originally appeared in the *Statesman* under the title of "THE LETTERS OF A WORLDLY WOMAN." The author desires to thank the proprietors of that paper for permission to reproduce them in book form.



INTRODUCTION.

" SHE did what was, I suppose, the wisest thing to do. She went away. There was a brother, I know, who planted indigo in the region north of the Ganges that used to be called the Garden of India in the days when planters made fortunes, and owned race-horses. They do neither now, but they are a philosophic people, and grow chillies and tobacco, and sugar-cane when indigo fails them, and play polo, and pigstick, and have a kind of seeming prosperity still.

I know it very well ; a flat and monotonous country that must not be confused for a moment with the places where tea is grown. I have had many a day after pig in the sandy tracts by the river, where the thick tamarisk bushes afford the only cover ; and days of teal shooting in the rice-lands, where the birds come in the cold weather. The climate is often uncomfortable, but it is always perfectly healthy, and because they do not lead the nomadic life of the services, planters can attain a degree of every-day comfort that we seldom ap-

proach. I have seen beautiful houses and gardens set in that drab land, over which scorching winds blow in May and June. In December, at least, it is glorious, when the mornings are dewy, and the winter crops turn the dull tints to living green.

Isolation used to be fairly complete on some of these estates, but good roads and motors, and the extension of the railways, have left few really isolated spots now. And it is a truism that wherever two or three are gathered together in India they will form a club—not a residential club, of course, just a place of re-union in the evening. I think, somehow, that the lady in whom you are interested will find that life up there is not void of advantages."

Extract from a letter.

LETTER I.

My friends mean to be kind when they condole with me on the rather exaggerated quietude of the spot in which circumstances have placed me, for a time at least. I suppose it is natural they should think that because I have for a long time taken a rather obvious interest in the society of my fellow-creatures, in dress, in gossip, and in "all the life that fizzes in the everlasting hills" (and in the plains, too, for that matter), I must, of necessity, find this place duller than do others. But I believe it is for that very reason that I shall be happy enough here.

I do not, for a moment, mean to reflect on the hollowness of the social round. On the whole, I enjoyed dancing my shoes into holes, and suppering and second suppering, and rehearsing silly musical plays, and going to polo matches, and races, and gymkhanas. Usually I was amused and sometimes I was not, and often I was very tired and very sad, but it did not make much difference to life as it has to be lived, and, at

times, I feel that I shall be better able to appreciate the full value of things here, where the stillness is so great as to be almost oppressive. I believe I can safely say that I have never known what it is to feel dull, although I have many times felt bored. It never bores me to be alone, but it does bore me to be with people who talk about their digestions, or the virtues of their relations, or ask questions, or tell you what they dreamt about last night.

That is what is so delightful about Randolph—he can't talk. Perhaps if he could, I should dislike him in a week; but as it is, he is the joy of my existence, and when he lays his dear, heavy head on my knee, and lifts his pink-rimmed eyes to mine, I know that I fill his world, with just a few thoughts over for squirrels and rats, and such like. I always thought it so original of the man who gave him to me to christen him Lord Randolph, because all the other bull-terriers I have known had plebeian names like Bill, or Sam, except one, who was called Boggins.

I think Randolph approves of this place and the number of squirrels we keep on the surrounding trees. Now that he has decided in which corner of my room his bed is to

stand, he crouches most of the day at the extreme edge of the verandah, his chin on his paws, and his eyes fixed on the gambolling squirrels, the while he considers the point of future attack. Randolph is not one of those who are likely to ruin the chance of a life-time by a too impulsive haste at the critical moment.

In the evening he and I tramp for miles on the dusty roads, and I tell him my hopes for the future, and my regrets for the past, and when we sit on the bank to rest, he gives me to understand that, in his opinion, all is for the best in this best of worlds, and that, whatever happens, I have got him. And so we go home happy.

Some one who lived here before we did loved the garden, and worked in it with energy and understanding. She—I think it was a woman—planted roses of many delicate varieties, made grass walks that pass under great arches of ramblers, left the clear lawn spaces that I love, and set shrubberies about them. Into these shrubberies she gathered all the colour that India gives us in such profusion, leaves of scarlet and copper, and tawny yellow, and shrubs that flower in masses of gorgeous bloom.

I could not have done these things myself, but I shall respect the thought and endeavour that went to the making of this garden, and shall cause the hedges to be trimmed, and the grass to be shorn, and the place to be kept as that other woman would have wished it to be. Perhaps, in time, I shall plant something on my own account, and cultivate a pride in it, and go out in the early dewy mornings to judge of its growth instead of lying in bed, as is my present lazy habit.

Nature gave me no taste for the country, or for its pursuits, but it seems that, in most parts of India, they have to be cultivated in sheer self-defence. Here I find that I am expected to know something of the feeding of cows and fowls, and even of buttermaking; for we make our own, and the servants are not particularly expert. Now I shall come to have knowledge of the sowing of seeds, and the growing of cabbages, and, in the end, I suppose, I shall become enormously interested in it all, as people must become in any environment, if they are going to make anything at all of their lives.

* * * * *

There are some who might account me, in a sense, unfortunate, in that I have never been able to make a fetish of my house, as I have seen some women do. My drawing-room has never appealed to me as an altar on which to offer up innumerable photographs of my friends, and a "silver table" would be an embarrassment rather than a delight to me. I can remember my friends very well without photographs. Randolph caught in one of his plainer moments graces a silver frame on my dressing table, but the only other photo on which I set any value is a blurred snapshot, taken by myself, long since of someone whose face, being in shadow, can only be guessed at. My ideal room has comfortable chairs, and plenty of books and papers, some good china and a mass of flowers, with the pictures I really want to look at hung with decent wall spaces between them.

I can revel in a house cleaning, with its attendant smell of whitewash and varnish, and its subsequent snowy curtains and polished surfaces, but when I have decided where my furniture looks its best, I have no desire ever to shift it again, and I could not exist in the atmosphere

of perpetual upheaval that seems to me suggestive of those suburban residences where they "do" the best bedroom on Monday, and the drawing room on Tuesday, and make a mild religion of the stair rods. Such an obsession drains all the purpose out of life; personally, I would sooner be comfortably dead.

At times the extreme stillness that broods over the compound threatens to get on my nerves. On these occasions I get into something rather gorgeous in the matter of a frock, and sit on the verandah reading a novel in which the scenes are set in the very highest society, and the characters indulge in witty, frivolous repartee of the kind that occurs to you next morning.

The servants think that my apparel must mean coming visitors, and bustle about, and make cakes for tea, and look at me in disappointment when they realise that I am clothed in amethyst satin for my own satisfaction, for Indian servants like you to entertain.

* * * * *

I do not deny that I look upon clothes as one of the joys of life. As matters stand I believe I can say that, together with

Randolph, they constitute my chief present joy. I can recall no circumstances under which they have failed to be some kind of consolation to me, and I acknowledge that I would slave and starve, and sit up at night sewing, in order that I might go fine. I pity the woman who would not, for after all to be plain is a misfortune that nobody can help, but dowdiness is a blunder that every woman can avoid.

Elizabeth does not approve of my habit of wearing what she considers my "best" clothes on ordinary occasions. Elizabeth is my ayah, but as she was brought up in a native Christian orphanage somewhere on the Madras side she prefers to be called my maid. She came to live with us when I was very small, and nursed the younger members of the family through teething and measles, and wept when we went to England to be "brought up," and welcomed us back when we returned. So she is privileged and I love her, but her value as a maid is discounted by a defective memory that she refuses to acknowledge.

"Elizabeth," I say, "where is my box of pins?"

"What box of pins, darlin'?" asks Elizabeth, with every indication of surprise.

"Oh, just the ordinary box; you know it quite well."

"No, darlin', you forgettin'," says Elizabeth firmly, "you never had no box of pins," and so on, until I find the pins myself, when she says "Oh, *that* box," rather contemptuously. According to Elizabeth I have forgotten a good deal, even to the ages of my several brothers, and their personal appearance. So that when Jack sees fit to send me a staring presentment of himself, in an obviously uncomfortable uniform, Elizabeth says critically, "That very nice photo of Mr. Cecil, darlin'."

"That's not Cecil, you old silly," I tell her, "That's Jack."

"I not knowin' my own child!" cries Elizabeth indignantly. "No, darlin', you forgettin'. Jack-baba much older than that by now," and then we proceed to wrangle about the respective ages of Jack and Cecil.

I suppose I must look upon it as one of my crosses that Elizabeth does not get on with Randolph. She did not approve of my accepting him, and now that he is here, she does not approve of him. She hurts

his feelings by alluding to him as "the dog," and she sniffs when he jumps on my bed in the morning and asks for a strip of the toast that comes in with my tea.

But Randolph takes it all most equably and turns a sympathetic eye on me. He knows, dear man, that we must be tolerant for the sake of past events, for Elizabeth's own child died the while she crooned over her "Cecil-baba."

LETTER II.

LIFE would be shorn of half its disappointments if the post never came in. Where you have only one post a day, it comes in an ostentatious fashion that causes you to lay unnatural stress on its possibilities. It is a platitude that you cannot cure the human heart of hope. I used to think that Watts's dreary young woman sitting on the roof of the world with her broken harp was more symbolic of Despair than of anything else, but I have learned of life since then.

When the post bag has disclosed two shop circulars, a dun, and the daily paper, Randolph and I decide to drown our sorrows in driving two miles to the Club, albeit the distractions of our Club are not of a quality unduly to exhilarate any one. There are tennis-courts, however, and papers and magazines, and bridge tables, and if too many people do not elect to patronise the Club on the same evening, the bearer manages, in time, to serve us all with drinks and cigarettes. We make a bid to

emulate larger establishments by ruling that no dog be allowed on the premises ; but this rule does not seriously affect Randolph, for, despite Elizabeth, he has never thoroughly grasped the fact that he is a dog ; and, of course, nobody would be hard-hearted enough to turn him out. So he comes with me into the little bare reading-room, and sits on as much of my skirt as the present fashions allow him to appropriate, and looks thoughtful, the while I try to read the English papers.

I never can concentrate much attention on papers when there are people about me, even if I am not interested in the people ; and in truth I am interested in most people. The kind of intimacy into which one is drawn in a club is so utterly apart from one's real inner life that it cannot affect it at all ; but it is pleasant in its way. Between women it usually expresses itself, in these latitudes at any rate, in an exchange of cookery recipes and paper patterns of blouses.

Women who make a bid for originality by declaring that they cannot tolerate the society of their own sex, usually represent women as absorbed in such subjects as

babies, servants, and the price of food. It is an excellent thing that we should have some such safe topics on which to meet. In a country where most people know, not only one's business in life, but tastes, parentage, past history, income and expenditure, conversation can easily become both complicated and dangerous. With acquaintances it is best to walk on the beaten path. And yet . . . sometimes a divergence has its charm, and its value, as I have lately proved.

A young man came to see me last week. He came on my brother's invitation, but his entertainment devolved on me. After I had taken him round the garden and the stable, and told him Randolph's pedigree, I wondered how I was going to amuse him for the two days he was to spend with me. Then we began to talk of books. He had read a good deal in a desultory sort of way, Kipling and Stevenson, and Browning and a little of Emerson, and because he had read only that which interested him, and had never been under that baleful influence "a course of reading," he had brought something away from it all, even if it was only the power to understand, and to be

touched. He was half ashamed of his enthusiasm ; as if one need be ashamed of having a soul in this world where so many humans seem to have been denied one !

Later, in the quick intimacy that comes of a kindred taste in books we spoke of other matters. Sitting in a corner of my sofa smoking many cigarettes, and stroking Randolph with a trembling hand, he told me there was an *affaire*—hopeless, so it seemed to him. I, reading between the lines, saw that it was hopeless only because the woman was just sufficiently in love to enjoy being in love. Women frequently do enjoy it, but I never knew any manly man who did. If he did, he was a miserable vapouring creature, not worth considering. Love interferes too much with a man's pursuits, his business, his amusements. If he is worth anything, the " tender passion " is a consuming fire, and no one likes being burnt alive.

This woman was content to be loved, but gave nothing, braved nothing ; was afraid of " making herself cheap " in the horrid phrasing of the world. As if love were ever anything but wildly, madly extravagant ! Indeed, my friend is not, poor boy, of the

type that women break their hearts for; the essentially and wholly masculine man, who, being dense to the point of cruelty, is incapable of understanding the first thing about the feminine temperament, and is, on the whole, far more genuinely interested in polo ponies than in women. That kind of man is often extraordinarily attractive to sensitive, imaginative women, and the results are frequently pitiful.

He will get over it, of course. Love is like measles, dangerous only when it attacks us late in life, but it hurts just the same at any age, and it was to the hurt I offered sympathy—inwardly. Outwardly I could suggest little consolation. I don't think he wanted me to; it was relief enough to have talked.

I am glad he spoke. I do not, for a moment, share in the foolish belief that unreserved people are invariably shallow. I cannot believe that anyone wants to hug joys or griefs to his or her own soul.

People who suffer in silence do not usually do so from choice, but because nature has so constituted them that they cannot do anything else. Most reserved persons are merely inarticulate, and then they label

as "shallow" the fortunate few who can find words in which to clothe their emotions. Of course, there are the limits of courtesy. If your friend has renounced you, or your lover proved faithless, or your children ungrateful, you must still present some kind of front to the world. It is only decent to do so. Besides society is impatient of unhappiness ; to obtain its favour it is not necessary to be clever, or witty, or beautiful, but it is quite necessary to be, or to seem to be, happy. It is only the very young or the very foolish who imagine that their woes awake its pity or interest. But to our friends or to those magnetic souls who, even on short acquaintance, draw confidence, why not give it ? To confess is, I really believe, one of the most natural of human impulses, and if you can speak, it is foolish to allow yourself to be oppressed by that epithet "shallow."

When that nice friendly boy had ridden away, my little drawing room seemed very quiet, and, somehow, Randolph did not appear so human as usual. I tried to read "Brazenhead the Great" because the adventures of that amazing swash-buckler usually amuse me enormously ; but to-day

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I could not laugh. Because I had made a friend I felt, suddenly, dreadfully friendless, knowing how these things go by. I took Randolph on my knee and kissed his coat, that smells of sunlight soap and phenyle. Then I found there were some tears there. I do not know why I should cry : except, perhaps, because the post comes in every day.

LETTER III.

CHRISTMAS came and went, and the *mali** hung festoons of beautiful and evil-scented marigolds about the verandah, and the local shop advertised itself as having a stock of "pictorial story books (Biblical, Moral and Coronation)." Being in this retired spot, exempt from the elaborate pretence of enjoyment that mars the seasons for most grown-ups, we passed a pleasantly restful day. The English mail timed its arrival for Christmas morning, and Randolph devoured all the envelopes and most of the cards sent me by maiden aunts who live in the country. All those I had forgotten in the wild orgy of correspondence in which most of us indulge in the first week in December, sent me loving greetings, and those I had remembered forgot me, as is the experience of most people. It is as well it was so, for Randolph had more glazed card than is good for any dog. He choked on a touching verse about holly and friendship, and condescended to retire as far as the

* Gardener.

door mat, at the vociferous bidding of my brother, who cherishes an illusion that Randolph obeys *him*. In reality Randolph has never obeyed anyone; obedience being foreign to his breed, as every one who knows the trend of the bull-terrier mind is aware.

Randolph's former master wrote me a letter of exactly six lines, in which he hoped that I was well, that Randolph was behaving himself, that my brother was well, and that we would have a merry Christmas. If you cannot express yourself with any ease on paper, I suppose you cannot, and there is an end of it, but it is rather a pitiful circumstance—for your friends I mean. For yourself it is probably one of the blessings that come in disguise, for those of us who can express ourselves by the pen are frequently confronted with the temptation to write too often and too much for our own ultimate peace of mind. And yet I am not sure but that "a little indiscretion is a delightful thing," to paraphrase the poet. If none of us ever said or did or wrote anything indiscreet, life would be a much less complicated affair, but it certainly would be dull.

It was a dull, cold day, with some clouds about, not in the least the kind of "Christmas Day in India" that was illustrated in the picture books of our youth, with the punkah swinging overhead, and piles of tropical fruit on the table, and a tiger or two peering round the pillars of the verandah.

Randolph and I spent the afternoon before the fire, eating chocolates, and wishing we had chestnuts to roast on the bars. We were not even depressed when my brother looked in to say that I should probably have a headache, and that he suspected himself of a coming cold in the head. Jim is a person addicted to gloomy views. We tried to walk off our dissipations in the evening. The sky looked as if someone had been swishing the clouds about with a gigantic broom, and the sun setting behind the leafless *scesoo* trees smeared the sky with ruby and opal; the fiery Tasmanian kind of opal. There was a forlorn suggestion of autumn in the dull soft light, and the long stretches of rice stubble over which the smoke from the villages hung low. One felt that the ground might be white tomorrow, and the pools covered with thin

ice, and the road hard and slippery. Beauty is for "the seeing eye," but I do not think I realised until now how beautiful can be even this flat country, with its monotony of trees and fields, and clusters of mud huts and gaunt palms. The blue mists over the garden in the early morning, the gleaming fields of mustard and tobacco in the sharp light of midday, the purple shadows at dusk, the silence and peace over the fertile land, appeal to me as more insistently beautiful scenes scarcely did. I thank the Providence that found me this refuge at a time when I seemed to have come sharply against the very jagged corners of life.

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The Mem Sahib drove over to see me next day. I call her the Mem Sahib, not because she is the only one of the species within hailing distance, but because she seems the most typical of the district we live in. She is a wonderful person, who never seems to want to go Home or to the hills, who makes her own clothes, and her own cakes, and is never dull, dowdy, or depressed. She is an authority on gardening, on poultry, and on every kind of household management, and is one of those delightful busy

people who always have time to spare for you. When you meet her in a frock that ought to have come from Bond Street, it is correct to say " You didn't make *that* yourself," but, as the cherub who clings to her exceedingly nice skirts informs me, " Mother makes everything in our house except the boots and shoes."

The Cherub is six years old, and in a climate better suited to the cultivation of indigo than of children has managed to develop the vitality, the calves, and the digestion of the true British infant. His habit of collapsing with a shriek on Randolph's neck at first struck apprehension to my heart, for, so far as I know, Randolph is unacquainted with the young of the human race, and his temper is, at no time, to be implicitly relied on. But, like all properly constituted dogs, he is as wax in the hands of a child, and meekly suffers himself to be dragged round the garden clad in such incongruous and undignified garments as a vest, socks, a broad piece of ribbon passed about his middle and tied in a flaring bow on his spine, and my motor bonnet, from which a bunch of violets dangles coquettishly over his left eye.

The Mem Sahib instructs me in such philosophy as it seems it is necessary to cultivate in the lonely life, which must not for a moment be confounded with the simple life. Entire agreement with your men kind is one of the first principles ; harmony of the description that keeps a boat-load of shipwrecked sailors in, at least, seeming accord. You would not quarrel with your sole companion in an adventure to the North Pole, and here your isolation can become nearly as complete—if you allow it to do so. This, says the Mem Sahib, you must not do ; you must never *let go*. It is easy to lose interest in people, to wear clothes that do not become you, to become entirely comfortable, entirely uninteresting, domesticated and—happy.

“ Then why,” I venture to suggest, “ not do so ? ” But the Mem Sahib, like the lady in a vulgar song, says, “ Certainly not ! ” Meets—a generic term for a week of such gaiety as borders on delirium—are, she assures me, as necessary as are food and drink. If you avoid them, you “ drop out,” lose touch with your fellows, are forgotten. “ People forget so quickly in India,” she says. Mercifully it is so, but the Mem Sahib

cannot be expected to realise this. She is quite complaisant and contented in her niche in the world, and has fell intentions of some day dragging me into the revels of which she speaks.

In the meantime I hope that she will come to see me quite often, for she is one of those who talk sometimes of things, and not always of people, as is the way in these regions.

Randolph was so depressed after the Cherub's departure that he became ferocious, and attempted to slaughter a goat that we met in our evening walk. That is like Randolph; he is a person of moods, and, after passing nineteen goats with perfect amiability, will take a sudden dislike to the twentieth goat, and have to be hauled off its throat. This peculiarity of his is becoming so marked that our appearance in a village is the signal for a general stampede amongst the old women, each seizing some loudly protesting goat, and dragging it into the comparative safety of a mud hut, a proceeding viewed by Randolph with a contemptuous sniff. I fear he needs a stronger hand than mine on his collar.

LETTER IV.

"It is this sort of thing," said my brother gloomily, as he laid down the paper, "that puts a man off matrimony."

"Perhaps she loved him," I suggested, for I had known the heroine of the *cause célèbre* in other days

"Women never think of anything but love," said he irritably. "If they *must* be in love, why not with their own husbands?"

"It certainly would be less complicated," I admitted, "but you forget, dear, that most married men appear to be carefully guarding against any such contingency."

My brother, who considers as utterly unprofitable any discussion unconnected with indigo, polo ponies, or the weather, grasped his hat and disappeared into the region of turmoil known as "the factory," leaving me to the society of Randolph, whose views on social questions are naturally primitive.

We sneer when we speak of "the eleventh commandment," but there is a very

real sin in being found out. It means shame and sorrow for those who have trusted us, and there is no bitterness in life like that of feeling shame for another. Right and wrong are so largely a matter of convention and custom that I am inclined to assert that the only real sins are those deeds that hurt someone else.

Ah! little pretty lady, whose wistful eyes I well remember; it is the women who have looked most longingly into that secret orchard who will punish you now for stealing the fruit. Did you deliberate, I wonder, and choose; deciding that the world—this foolish and pharisaical, and yet pleasant and amusing social world of ours—was as nothing when weighed against Love? I fear me you did not, that indeed only the exceptional women do, and that it was just the eternal mother in you that caused you to give yourself as you would have given a cake to a spoilt child. Men are seldom more than spoilt children to the women who love them, and it is usually the completely unworthy who are the most truly loved.

It is strange that a woman will suffer all things for—and from—the man except

renunciation. She would walk barefooted on hot iron, but she will not give him up—which is often the only kind thing she can do for him. It is always the kindest thing, for the notion that men suffer less through social ostracism than do women is a fallacy. Men are, on the whole, far less reckless and adventurous in the field of love than are women, and they are apt to find life but a thorny affair outside of that enclosure of *bourgeois* comfort that we have built for ourselves and nicknamed convention. Then begins repentance, for it is seldom of our sins that we repent, but of the results of those sins when they begin to hurt us.

It is February, and I am suffering now from the longing for England that always takes me in early spring; the nostalgia for daffodils, and wet violets, and primroses in damp woods. Of course, to give in to that feeling and to go Home then, would be mere disappointment. One has to have endured the dark winter in order to get the full value of the spring; to feel the stir in the air that comes with the first leaf-buds on soot-blackened London branches, the first bunch of narcissi, the first spring gown in the shop windows.

And, indeed, my garden now is very beautiful, almost over-full with roses, with bees hovering over velvet wallflowers, and the country, outside the neat hedges that bound it, all green and gold with the ripening winter crops. It is hard to believe that in little more than a month all this beauty will have withered before the rush of hot winds, and only a few brave snapdragons and hollyhocks will be left to deck the arid plots.

For the present I am content enough to sit on the lawn, with a repentant Randolph in my lap.

Randolph and I have not been on the best of terms this morning. He is becoming unpleasantly expert in the slaughter of squirrels, and he does not take reproof in a generous spirit. After the reproof—which took a practical form—he stalked out into the lawn to brood on his wrongs, and I believe we held a conversation somewhat on these lines.

Randolph: "What a fuss about nothing; I wish I had never consented to live here. My master was a sportsman; he didn't cry when I killed a silly squirrel."

Myself: "You know you have a far softer time here than you had with your

master. He was just a man. Men don't understand."

Randolph: "Who wants a soft time? I was the best fighter in the cantonments. Here I'm expected to be a lap dog: you'll tie me up in blue ribbons next."

Here Randolph, panting heavily with disgust threw himself down, and watched me sulkily as I buried the squirrel in a flower bed. But we have "made it up" now, and Randolph, seated at a little distance, pursues an ardent entomological research, with but poor results. I would like to reflect on the heavenly blue of the sky and the scent of the sweet-peas that have just come into full bloom, but Randolph's occupation is just a trifle distracting.

"Randolph," I say sharply, "no nice dog would do that."

Randolph turns on me a glance that says perfectly, plainly "I'm a nice dog and I'm doing it," and I feel properly snubbed.

We are, on the whole, far too much given to generalising in matters of manners, and of the minor moralities. There are people who assert that no "nice" woman smokes, or uses rouge, or pin curls, or swear

words, or tells lies about her dance programme. In reality we all know some perfectly nice women who do these things, and some perfectly horrid ones who do them also. Smoking, for instance, always seems to me as much a question of inclination as eating marmalade, or wearing white tennis shoes or purple stockings. You may be charming and do it, or detestable and not do it.

Those persons who believe in the ethical value of every action, and even of personal characteristics will, one day, tell us that virtue is to be found only in blondes, and that to have wavy hair or a snub nose marks you out for ultimate perdition. Even as it is, one witty and enlightened writer has enjoined us "never trust a woman who wears mauve, whatever her age. She has a history." Personally, I should think that the woman with a history is the most trustworthy person in the world. She has learnt the value of discretion. But, in reality, we all have histories, some vivid and enthralling as a romance by Maurice Hewlett, and some good and safe like Edna Lyall's stories; some are tuned to the passionate rhythm of Swinburne's verse, and some flow in the

even number of Adelaide Proctor, but we all have histories, of which the small world about us knows a little, and thinks it knows a great deal more.

The nice boy who gave me his confidence some time since came again to see me a few days ago. As I predicted, he is "getting over" his unhappy affair, although it will be long before he concedes that this is so. He does not know—he is perhaps not old enough to know—what it means to be thankful that love is dead, that our prayers have been answered, and we free, at last, of that dread fever.

He is, however, sufficiently recovered to babble of a dance he has been to; one of the revels they are prone to in these parts, when to seek your bed at dawn means that you are considered to have shirked half the fun.

"The silly band gave out after the sixth extra," he informs me, "and we gave 'em three cheers, and got a fellow to the piano. When most of the lamps had gone out we went down to third supper, and some one danced a cakewalk down the table, and we felt we *were* seeing life. When it was quite light we got into tennis kit and

had a ripping sett. I wish you had been there."

"I don't," I said fervently, but, perhaps, not quite truthfully. I feel that it will not be long before the Mem Sabib lures me to something of the sort.

LETTER V.

To Randolph's master—

It was nice of you to follow up your Christmas letter by saying that, although you can't write letters yourself, the people who can do so ought to put foolish pride out of the question. I accept your invitation at once, feeling somehow that the pride that gives only just so much as is given, and expects a return for everything, is rather a poor sort of thing really. Letter writers frequently have it in excess, and it makes rather an exhausting business of friendship, this insistence on an "answer." We have all got our own lives to lead, our little wearisome, absorbing daily lives, and it is hardly fair to mistrust our friends because they are, for the time, out of our immediate environment.

I think that the reason my own family is so peaceful a one is that we all recognise this fact of separate interests. We go each, persistently, on our way, and in consequence, like each other as well as though we were merely friends, and not relations at all. We

have no regular correspondence, we have never acquired the pernicious habit of handing letters round the family, and our motto is "No Interference." In consequence we never have, and almost certainly never will, approach the degradation known as "a family quarrel." The brother with whom I am now living threw open his house to me at a time when it seemed that if my life had not come to a full stop it had certainly arrived at a dismal semicolon. So I came, with Elizabeth, who does not brush my skirts very nicely, but is a comfort, and Randolph—well, you know what I think about Randolph! My brother is not a cheerful person, but he refrains from being "kind"—you know the sort of kindness that holds your hand, and tells you that all is for the best, and suggests tea. He leaves me alone, and nothing is quite unbearable when you are by yourself.

Poor Jim is one of those unfortunate persons who see all the cobwebs of life, and none of the rainbows. He cannot look at Randolph without suggesting "Keating's," but he has never seen the trust in his dear, pink-rimmed eyes. He is not a grumbler; he sees all the little "uglies" of life; the dust

in the corners, the leaves on the path, but he does not complain about them; he just remarks them. What may serve to add to his depression is that he is one of the people to whom the minor misfortunes of life are always happening; if he goes a-travelling the engine breaks down, or the train misses connexion, or the ticket collector has a fit on the platform. Haven't you met those kind of people? You couldn't put any of these mishaps down to their own carelessness or recklessness, so clearly there is something in the Jonah theory, although Emerson says that only shallow people believe in luck. But you don't read Emerson, I know. I never, myself, read anything but the obvious bits of him—such as people quote when they have a reputation for culture to keep up—until I came into the boundless leisure of this place.

Now I read deep of him and of others, so that if I ever come out into the big world again I shall have to walk very warily, so that none shall know I am become a lettered person, and shun my society. For I know very well that women do not become popular by reason of their intelligence, but by reason of their tact in concealing it. Men do not

like clever women, although they sometimes like them in spite of their cleverness.

I wish I could catch the golden days we are having now, and hold them to myself for a little longer ; days when the west winds spring up soft and warm at midday, and lie down cold at night, really cold, I mean, so that I snuggle under an eiderdown, and Randolph sleeps like a whiting, with his nose on his tail. Before long it will be all west wind, and dust, and punkhas, with no flowers at all. But then I shall shut the doors, and sit in the drawing-room weaving flowers for myself, for I am one of those almost extinct beings—a woman who likes needlework. I love to see gorgeous silken blossoms grow under my fingers, to choose my colours, and to couch the gold and silver threads. And then the final joy of knowing that there is one more beautiful thing in the world, and that made by me ! I have actually felt sorry for men in that they can never know the joy of needlework ; but, of course, that was both impertinent and unnecessary, for I never yet met a man who envied a woman for anything.

* * * * *

But I have not spent all my time in sewing and reading and dreaming in my cabbage

patch. I have been to a Meet. The Mem Sahib lured me forth to observe the wild planter in his lighter moods. She put it that way, not I. "The Gimcracks will put you up," she ended airily. When I demurred that the Gimcracks had not seen me, probably had not even heard of me, she assured me that I was lucky if they had heard only the truth, and that it would be wise to come forth and prove to an inquisitive world that I had not got pimples or a squint. Of course, I went. You told me, yourself, that my complexion—well, I went!

After we had waited hours for a train that was attaching horse boxes to itself three stations up the line, we found ourselves in a first-class carriage that was already well piled with cabin trunks and hat boxes, and rolls of bedding and baskets of flowers, and tennis racquets and golf clubs, and saddles looking like dismembered bodies in sacks, besides a lot of cheerful people who were mainly occupied in exchanging vigorous personalities. When, after a hot but hilarious journey of a few hours, the servants hauled the luggage on to the platform, I was pleased to observe that we had not more camp beds, folding tables, bath tubs, hand lanterns, or

mirrors rolled in horse blankets than most people, and that, if my brother's polo-boots flaunted from the insufficient folds of a striped duster, many other polo-boots did the same.

And then we were met by a charming hostess, who hoped vaguely that our tents had not been pitched in the sun. She was obviously uncertain—and remained so until the last day of the Meet—as to the members of her "camp." You brought your own tent, and your servants dumped it down, and arranged the camp furniture, and up at the house there were meals and smokes and drinks at all hours, and for all-comers. The gaieties ran, of course, along the usual lines of such things—accelerated, because the social amenities of a month had to be compressed into a week. I never saw anything to surpass the energy of the hard and sunburnt young men who clattered about most of the morning in volunteer khaki, and changed for tennis, and changed for polo, and changed for the evening and danced all night and changed again for parade and tennis, and so on through feverish nights and days during which the last thing anyone with pretensions to being

a sportsman appeared to think of was sleep. I suppose, however, they must have snatched an odd half hour or so, at such time as they could escape the vigilance of the ultra-energetic ones, who made a practice of hauling down the tents of any such shirkers. On the last day, everyone talked a great deal about fancy dresses, and tailors sewed hurriedly at gorgeous but insecure-looking garments, whose wearers proclaimed their intention of dancing the sun' up. A number of them did so, and then, next midday, there we were back again in the stuffy railway carriage, sitting amidst the same assortment of luggage and saddlery, even the sunburnt young men a little jaded, a little hollow-eyed, but no less vigorous in personalities and in reminiscence. Personalities were, indeed, the dominant conversational note of the week. They were rampant at meal times, and pervaded the after-supper speeches to an almost alarming extent, dying down, it seemed to me, only with the roar of the departing train that deposited us once more at our little peaceful station. And now that I am back in my own quiet garden I know that I liked it all, the friendliness and the good-fellowship, the dancing

and the feasting, and the forgetfulness of it. There is something a little pathetic in this avidity of pleasure, and in the thought of the loneliness to which many of the revellers return.

This is all of me, but what of you? I would like to hear something a little more personal than that your best polo pony is lame, and that the latest joined subaltern is "turning out quite a decent member of society." I doubt if I ever shall hear more though. Randolph sends you a sniff. He has acquired this most irritating habit of late, possibly through discontent. He finds this existence a trifle enervating, and not quite the affair of a bull-terrier; but he is willing to make concession to my prejudices, and behaves fairly well, on the whole.

LETTER VI.

To a Friend—

Your letter saddened me a little, making me feel, in some vague way, selfish, in that I am at leisure, whilst you are working hard. I would give you some of this ease if I could, my dear, and I am grateful enough that, whatever the difficulties of my life have been, overwork has not been one of them. For, disguise it as we may, we women were not meant to work, and we do not like to work. Woman, whatever may be said to the contrary by those strenuous beings who claim the rights and proclaim the wrongs of the sex, is essentially idle and luxurious. She loves to wear silk stockings, and to bask in the sun of life, and her heart will never cease to protest against a Fate that ordains that she shall do otherwise. A great deal has been said and written about the joy of work for work's sake, but I do not believe the normal woman does take that joy in it. Ask in the long hospital wards, in the stuffy office, in shops, in schoolrooms, at the desk, in the green-

room ; what does the tired working woman say, when her defences are down, and she looks into her heart and speaks truth ?

Yet I grant that women work more patiently and ploddingly than do men ; but that, I think, is because the traditions in which we are bred from babyhood demand that we do well that which we do not like doing at all, whilst a man's creed rarely includes anything uncongenial. I knew a man who used to say, " Most women spend their lives in doing the things they think they ought to do ; they seldom do anything they really *want* to do." His conception of our sense of duty was an exaggerated one, no doubt, but have you noticed that most of the things one really wants to do are, on reflection, either indiscreet or unkind, and one would not wish to be either ?

Being a working woman, you will not accuse me of being a traitor to my sex in speaking so openly. It is good to be independent, most commendable and courageous, but—do any of us, in our hearts, *want* to be independent ? I do not think it, any more than I believe that the majority of women would have preferred to be men. Many of them say so, but is it not, in most

cases, a pose? For myself, I am well content to be a woman—the woman to whom Randolph was given . . .

Randolph leads the life of a sultan—and doesn't like it. He was born a scallywag, a cattle worrier, and a fighter to the death. His face and neck are so deeply corrugated with scars of battle that I doubt if there is much of the original dog left, and I know that the last thing he would desire is a peaceful death on his own little bed. "I was ever a fighter, so—one fight more," he would say, could he comprehend Browning.

He likes to wallow in gore; and as he is what the hospitals technically term "a bleeder," he fulfils his ambition after every encounter with one of his enemies.

Yet he has his softer moods; Randolph washed, sleepy, smelling of soap, and resting his head on my knee as he lies on the sofa, is something to forgive and to be thankful for. And, indeed, although I find his propensities inconvenient, I would not have him different, any more than I would have his master less selfish and careless, less confident, reckless and gay . . .

I wonder why some of the most sensitive of women turn to the man who gives them least

of himself? Perhaps it is because there is something appealing and almost pitiful in the occasional softer moods of a very hard man; a woman easily believes that the mood is for her alone, and so the spell is woven. But it is only the strong man who may be hard, and yet be loved; hardness without strength, I have seen that, too, and it is most pitiable and unlovely. . . .

I speak of the leisure of this place, but unless you have been in Behar you can never know what I know now—the infinite peace of these fertile stretches of land. Spring is over now, and the young *seesoo* trees, which were such gay green things in their feathery new dresses have taken on a darker sedater hue. The cotton trees have dropped their thick and vivid flowers, and stand gaunt as before, and in the garden, the white *Bauhinia* that used to strew its azalia-like petals about the lawn is hung with long, green seed-pods. But still the evening air is heavy with the scent of petunias and carnations, of mango blossom and pumelo blossom, and the dust-laden west wind that blows hard all day is cool in the small hours.

There is a heart in this garden, the heart of the woman who lived here before we did,

and who planned it all. Show gardens never have hearts, only those places where people have lived and worked and thought and hoped. Do you remember those gardens we used to walk in once, you and I, the property of a Maharaja who visits his estate but seldom? How sad and empty they were, those carefully planned grounds, with scrupulously kept walks, and orchid houses, and exotic plants that few saw, and no one really cared for. And the palace, how it seemed to brood beside the lake, and to ask for human occupancy. A foolish-looking palace it was, with its pink pillars, and green lattices and royal blue balconies, and its general effect of an elaborate and fantastically-coloured birthday cake. In the evening a native band, attired in a travesty of the Blue Hungarian uniform, used to play selections from the latest musical comedy to an audience composed of a few railway employees, the ladies from the mission, a sprinkling of ayahs and children, and ourselves.

In the intervals the band sat at the edge of the stand, consuming thick cakes and lemonade, and the whole thing was a quaint blending of East and West, of civilization and barbarity.

But they were happy days. I have thought since that if I were asked to pick out the happy times of my life I would put my finger on that as one of the happiest. The trouble is that we seldom recognise happiness until it has gone, and I suppose the only remedy is to ask ourselves at any time when we are not acutely miserable, "Am I not happy after all?" If the heart makes reply in the negative, we can, at least, in after years, take up the attitude of Miss Sally Brass to the Marchioness, "Now don't you say I didn't offer you meat!"

The mistake most of us make is in setting out to look for happiness in love; when, in reality, it is usually to be found in companionship. But it is a mistake that we shall continue to make for ever and for ever—thank Heaven!

At all events we were, in that quiet spot, free from obligation to that fetish of the up-country station—the club! In a small station these obligations are more exigent than in a large one, the rites more carefully observed, the omissions more severely punished. Every evening must we hie ourselves there, under pain of being dubbed unsociable,

exclusive or even worse. That you are resting, or writing letters, or seeing a friend, is regarded as a poor subterfuge. We do not go to exchange ideas, because, at an earlier stage in our intercourse, we exhausted all the ideas we ever had—all the club ideas, I mean. We would not like to incur a reproach of originality by saying some of the things we really think ; we are here to illustrate the importance of being dull.

We know each other's blouse patterns and cake recipes by heart ; we cannot gossip, because there is no absent member to gossip about ; we cannot even flirt, because by some accident in the construction of the club the separation of the sexes is emphatic. We sit in a hot room, because no one likes to be the first to suggest sitting outside, and the only occasional distraction is the hawking of a box of "mission" lace, about which we cluster to discuss *lingerie*. The bridge-players are the luckiest—they, at least, are not called upon to converse. They need not air their views on the delinquencies of khansamas and durzies, varied by complaints—on the part of the only two girls our adjacent station boasts—of the dullness of the young men. I do not feel myself

directly responsible for either the iniquities of the servants, or the virtue of the young men, so I usually choose this opportunity to plan, with the aid of the fashion papers, a garment of some description. My clothes are still a matter of extreme consideration to me, so be assured that I am not changed in any way.

LETTER VII.

To a Girl.—

You were right, absolutely so. To be bound by a scruple when your life's happiness is at stake appears to me like waiting to tidy your room when the house is burning. Your engagement became irksome to you, and you broke it off, and people who prided themselves on their very keen sense of honour said hard things of you in consequence; marriage being, in these good people's estimation, the preferable thing, and the subtle magic that was to provide the remedy for the doubts and weariness that had assailed you. My dear, I think you may now draw long breaths, and look out on a beautiful world, in exultation that you are free.

But and here's a big "but" . . . you had done it before; had rushed or had been beguiled into this very same situation, had wearied and questioned yourself, and gone through an agony of indecision, and had freed yourself in just the same way. And so, people thought themselves entitled to talk, and to call you heartless, never

realising that it is precisely because you are not heartless that you have made these grievous and rather cruel mistakes. But you could have made a worse mistake—that of marriage, and an ironical Fate decrees that it is for our mistakes that we pay most heavily—not for our sins.

I do not think you are one of the women who will marry young ; possibly you will not marry at all, because, after twenty-six one grows critical, and it becomes a question of the right man—whom it is quite likely that one will never meet ! It is always a pity if a woman does not marry, but it is a far worse pity if she does so for the sake of a trousseau, or a honeymoon. And there is a certain type of witty, unmarried woman of the world that we are coming to regard, rightly enough, as the salt of society—a type that only the ultra-provincial would designate as “ old maids.”

I don't wonder that so many mediocre writers leave their hero and heroine in the first flush of wedded life. To write convincingly and sympathetically of marriage calls for something more than mediocrity, and I wonder at times that any one dare attempt the task. Indeed, when you con-

sider this poor frail mutable human nature of ours, it seems almost incredible that thinking persons should have courage to plunge into matrimony at all. Our friends fall away, our environment changes, our thoughts, our aspirations, even our very souls, mature, but still there is one condition we must never cease to accept, one person to whom we must never change, even though that other personality may have developed along totally different lines to our own. Only dull people are unvaryingly consistent: those of imagination and temperament can scarcely think to-day as they thought, say, ten years ago. "Those who are faithful know only the trivial side of love; it is the faithless who know love's tragedies," we are told by a clever maker of epigrams, and indeed the remark "gives one to think."

Dear child, I am not writing to you as I should, considering the lapse in our ages. There is not, in these times, the great gulf between twenty and thirty that was presupposed in the Victorian era. Women of all ages meet as women—just that. All of us who are living at all, and are not mere pieces of pulp in the domestic machine, are

fighting much the same perplexing battle ; and the fact that some of us have been doing so for a few years longer than others, and are possibly a little nearer to the solution of the problem, is a matter of no consideration at all.

The longer I live the more surely do I see that the glorious youth vaunted by the poets is not the inestimable possession that they would have us believe ; I am, indeed, not sorry to have left mine behind. I do not wish to be arrogant, but women over thirty are not speaking the truth when they say—if they ever do!—that they would like to be eighteen again. You know very well that one is eighteen under protest. Youth is a troublesome complicated sort of thing, full of confusion and disappointment. When I was young I wore frocks that didn't suit me, and knew that they didn't suit, and yet did not know how to remedy it. I said the wrong thing, and fell in love with the wrong man because he danced so well, and fell out of love because I didn't like the ties he wore, and was happy and didn't know it, and miserable and exaggerated it.

Now I have realised my limitations, have gauged my capacity for sorrow and for joy,

and am content at times to stand aside and observe the game of life as played by others. My only regret is for those delightful castles in the air that I seem to have lost the knack of building in my more mature years.

Come and stay with me, and we will forget the strenuous aspect of life, and will gossip about our friends, and do elaborate stitches on afternoon tea cloths, and lead in general the ideally stodgy life. If you desire to ride all the morning and tennis all the afternoon, you may seek other scenes; here you must be content with the society of myself, Randolph, and—of course—Elizabeth.

Elizabeth is as dear as incompetent, and as unreasonable as ever, and has the same unpleasant habit of breathing down my spine when she fastens my dresses. She criticises the nice boy who frequents this house as "laughing too much for Civil Service gentleman." Do you happen to know the exact amount of levity that Civilians may be allowed to indulge in? This one has merely the fascinating high spirits that go with the perfection of health, and, now that his rather badly damaged heart has healed, he is excellent company.

My brother dawdles about most of the morning on a horse, making captious remarks to the people who weed his lands, and fierce and sonorous ones to those who feed their buffaloes on the young indigo.

Of course it is not actually the indigo that the unwieldy creatures consume; but, as grazing ground is poor and scarce, the villagers are glad to turn their cattle into our fields, to eat the fresh weeds and grass that spring between the plants, and incidentally to do an enormous amount of damage to the tender shoots. There is, it seems, nothing that is so sure a source of dispute and sometimes of violence between the planter and the villager as this question of cattle in the indigo. The state of fury to which my brother is aroused by the mere suspicion of such an offence always reminds me of Miss Trotwood and her cry of "Janet!—Donkeys!" In spite of that it seems that in nearly every patch of indigo that we visit in our morning ride there is a vision of a very small naked boy hustling, with vehement abuse, two or three bony grey buffaloes, and endeavouring to create the impression that they have but strayed in for a moment on their way to a neighbouring

tank. In the afternoon my brother sits in a small office, where to judge by the sounds that issue, shouting and excited people hurl rupees at him. He calls this collecting the rents.

Our house follows in its formation—or lack of it—along the usual lines of the up-country bungalow, a dark, cool, clumsy place, with every possible inconvenience, doors that do not fit, and pinch your fingers if you tamper with them, and rough walls from which, should you attempt to hang a picture, large pieces of plaster and whitewash detach themselves and fall on you. Fortunately, I am not much addicted to pictures—of the kind locally popular—and I have contented myself with making the place comfortable, with plenty of cushions and low chairs, and few ornaments or photographs to confuse the eye.

From the Mem Sahib you may learn to do wonderful things with a few yards of bazaar muslin, and some of the bright soft vegetable dyes of the country; or you may absorb wisdom from the Cherub, whose latest ambition is to be “A Royal Engineer, and drive a’ engine.”

He is, at the moment, seated on my lawn, tooth-brush in hand, a bottle of Odol on the

grass beside him, endeavouring to brush the teeth of a mildly protesting bull-terrier in whom I almost fail to recognise my truculent Randolph.

LETTER VIII.

JUNE is with us ; not the golden June of the poets, the month of roses and of song. There are no roses left in the arid garden, where the grass crackles under foot, and the flowering shrubs droop their leaves, and wait sadly for the rains to break. All day the house doors are barred against the scorching heat, and by night the punkah creaks and jerks and flaps, to the destruction of restful sleep. Of course properly constituted punkahs ought neither to creak nor flap. But punkahs are not unlike country-bred ponies, apt to develop fresh vices at unexpected moments.

And yet looking back to other summers I see that there are some advantages in my present mode of existence. You do not here get up in the morning wondering what you are going to do to-day ; anxious not to lose one hour of the precious time. You know very well that you are going to do precisely what you did yesterday : which, in my case, means to read a little, and write a little, and sew a little, and think a great deal ; and in

the way of conversation I say that this is the hottest day we have had, and when are the rains coming, and the post is late, and will there be a letter from—some one who doesn't matter in the least! My brother varies these remarks by telling the punkah-puller that he will have his life, in the expressive phrase of the country, and saying that the heat is withering the indigo, and there is a good deal of fever about.

In the evening there is a certain amount of excitement to be found in speculating as to whether a dust-storm will not chase Randolph and myself home across the fields. It has happened once or twice, and after the long day in the house there is a certain exhilaration to be found in the run across the rough land, with Randolph capering madly about me, and the hot, stinging wind behind. Then the rush into the dark and still cool bungalow, and the hurried clashing of the doors, and the descent of the storm about us, as we crouch together in the dark, Randolph and I. Elizabeth crossly says "Oh, my! my!" when she tries to brush the dust out of my hair, as if dust-storms were my fault. After the storm there comes, sometimes, a few merciful drop

of rain, that wash clean the flaming poinciana and laburnum trees that close in our garden. But next morning dawns hot and brazen as ever.

That nice boy friend of mine alleviates life for me considerably in these days. The Boy is as joyous as a puppy, and as self-absorbed. He acknowledges that he likes himself as a subject of conversation, and he says everything; which, in an inarticulate age, has its charm. Most of us talk too little; we are ashamed of being glad, and of our sorrows, which we nurse and hide, and call "sacred" on that account.

"What is the matter with girls nowadays?" He asked me the other morning. "They don't flirt."

"They don't flirt with you," I suggested.

"Oh, come now! You know very well that if they flirted with any one it would be with me," said he, with a grin and the arrogance of youth. "But they like golf better—and—lots of other things. Or they are the kind that call you by your nickname the second time they meet you, and throw chocolates about the table, and stuff dinner rolls down your neck. The nicest girls try

to mother me. They don't do it well, either. I've got a mother myself, and I know all about it. My mother gets her frocks from Paris, and never heard of anything so ridiculous as grey hair. When I asked her what she would like at Christmas she said that a gold and enamel cigarette case was the dream of her soul. She doesn't implore me to pay my debts, or renounce short drinks; that is what the nice girls do. It simply isn't natural."

"But you don't want to fall in love," said I. "No one could really want to do that."

"Of course not," said he, "but I do want to *talk* sometimes—about something that isn't ponies or the chances of the local polo team, or my dissipated habits. I want to sit in the moonlight, and yammer about myself, and quote Swinburne—well, Browning, then, if you're so particular—and—you know the sort of thing."

"No, I don't," I said firmly, "I've been a chaperon for more years than I care to remember. If I ever knew I've forgotten. It's time you ordered your pony round, isn't it?"

All the same I think the boy has a case. I seem to detect a very practical note about

the average girl of to-day. A lack of sentiment and of subtlety that may be a good thing in itself, but does not make for tenderness, nor for sweetness. Such good true wholesome girls one knows, and yet—too self-sufficient; a trifle defiant of the woman's part, lacking absolutely in the suggestion of mystery that is the essence of woman's attraction for man. And then—one sees it often—there comes along the Minx, the ultra-feminine woman who emphasises her femininity. Not bad—sound and sweet probably—but attracting openly, consciously, because she desires to attract. And before this type of woman, be she beautiful or not, man goes down like corn beneath the trampling foot. For the soul of man is far more primitive and pagan than that of woman conceives it to be, and all ideals of comradeship wither before the smile of the conqueror, who is all woman.

But though the passionate and tempestuous woman may charm, the perverse woman interest and attract, it is the amiable woman who really holds men; the serene, soft woman who never questions and who never nags. This type of woman is not necessarily virtuous, but she is always un-

selfish, and she is capable of holding a man through years of blind devotion on his part, and of openly expressed astonishment on the part of his friends.

LETTER IX.

THE Mem Sahib having gone a-visiting the Cherub has been entrusted to my care. I have never accounted myself especially sympathetic to children, but the Cherub has affairs of his own that are far too engrossing to allow him much time to wreak havoc on your dressing table; to lean against you and kick your chair, to polish the furniture with chocolate creams, to stamp on the dogs, or fall off the edge of the verandah, as is the irritating habit of many children of his summers. Although badly oppressed, particularly about the legs, with what he terms "tickely heat," he is cheerful and conversational. His interests, although varied, are for the most part, military.

"Is he a soldier?" he asks, in front of a photograph.

"Yes."

"Has he been wounded?"

"Not yet."

"I hope he will be soon," politely remarks the Cherub, this being the best wish he can wish for your friends. The Cherub

is accompanied by an elderly female retainer, alluded to as "ole ayah," a tin trunk containing the minute vests and knickers that form his seasonable apparel, and an assortment of war-worn lead soldiers, empty snail shells, rusty nails, and cartridge cases, the whole contained in an old cigar box, and brought, the Cherub informs me, in case he should feel "dis-amused."

"But I like here," he adds, gazing round the verandah, in the wide spaces of which it is now his delight to cavort wildly, waving a wooden sword, and shouting "Charge!" until he falls, riddled with bullets, and dies a glorious death. After which, a less exhausting game being advisable, he may be induced to draw upon his repertoire. The gem of this concerns itself with the misfortunes of a small boy named Bobby when visiting what the Cherub persistently alludes to as the "Soo." Bobby, having been guilty of the heartlessness of offering a stone to a bear expectant of a bun was, in dreams that night, obsessed by some curious animals described as "polo bears," who, having succeeded in capturing Bobby, led him dancing through the streets of Bear town. At night he was incarcerated in a dungeon

where, the Cherub solemnly assures me, there was "no nice where to sit!" The recitation of Bobby's sorrows affects the Cherub so deeply that it is a relief to every one, even to Randolph, when the "polo bears" are proved to be mere creatures of a nightmare, and Bobby's mother appears to comfort and to soothe. The Cherub, himself, is prone to the most wonderful dreams that ever were; the weak points in them being carefully filled in from a vivid imagination. "I like *purlending*," he observes shamelessly when detected.

But at times the dreams please him better in retrospect than in actuality as when in the night he demands my hand, and adds: "This was a snakey one," in extenuation of his weakness.

And now the Cherub has returned to his home, and Randolph has contracted a depressing habit of sitting on the edge of the verandah, and gazing expectantly down the drive. He pretends that he is merely planning how to circumvent the wily squirrels, but I know better, remembering how he used to follow the Cherub, even to the bath, with a beatific expression on his foolish old face. Dear Randolph, I know that I

am still first in his affections, but it is obvious that a person who pommels you with a pudgy fist, clothes you ridiculously in incongruous garments, drags you forcibly where you do not want to go, and explores your mouth for the purpose of counting your teeth, is due a large amount of respect and consideration. There is a wistfulness in Randolph's regard in these days ; his sentimental manners have grown a little more pronounced. He seems to be asking me questions as to the life we lead ; demanding to know if we are ever again going back to the big world : that world where bugles blow, and drums beat, and there are dogs to fight—dogs that *are* dogs, not pariahs that squeal and run home. I wonder, too

* * * * *

It is a damp, damp world we live in ; the rooms smell like cellars, and I should scarcely be startled to find mushrooms sprouting from the drawing-room floor. The pungent scent of the freshly-cut indigo floats in from the factory, with the shouts of the cartmen, the drone of the boilers, the splash of the paddles. Between the heavy showers the sun comes out, and draws the moisture from the teeming earth, and in the

evening Randolph and I walk between fields of vivid green rice-plants over which hang faintly mauve-tinged mists, while beyond we catch glimpses of the low purple hills of Monghyr.

While the rain persists I sit on the verandah sewing—tucks and seams, and fine embroidery, and again tucks, and more tucks. I used to think that women who cannot sew should not come to India ; but doubts creep in now. What Isabel Carnaby, that young woman of many epigrams, said of writing and flirting is true also of sewing. If you can do it, you *will* do it. And a needle can stab cruelly in more ways than one, for its use encourages and invites thought. Few of us who are over thirty care to dwell with our thoughts more than we must, and when it is India. . . . and the rains . . . and we are lonely. . . . !

Whilst I sew I, like the Cherub, am given to dreams. One of my dreams runs somewhat in this wise. Somebody says, in the verandah, " Hello, Randolph, you old rip ! " and Randolph squeals with delight. Then they both come in, and I say to a tall person who wears a loose coat smelling of peat and cigarettes, " You're looking very fit, "

and he says, "Thanks awf'ly. What have you been doin' with yourself?"

Then we sit on the sofa talking about the weather, and the unpleasantness of train journeys, because those are the things people really do talk about when they meet. Presently he says, "Well . . . ?" And Randolph comes and sits between us. Randolph is a very jealous dog. . . .

Elizabeth interrupts my dream. Elizabeth never did approve of the man in the Harris tweed coat, and she demands that I attend the airing of my wardrobe, which is spread in draggled state before the fireplace in the drawing-room. I would like to have a holocaust, but Elizabeth, after the manner of her kind, refuses to discard so much as a ribbon without something approaching mutiny. "Darlin," she says, reproachfully, extracting a soiled and tarnished scrap of trimming from the waste paper basket where I had fondly imagined it hidden, "you not throwing away this *lovely* thing! costing lots of money once!" and when I call her a "magpie," she is offended and says I am "calling very wicked names." Elizabeth, of course, has no idea that I am grown up.

There are few things more pathetic, and almost tragic, than faded finery. Not the brocades and laces of our grandmothers, kept sweet in cedarwood chests, and worthy of the treasuring. But our own gowns of yesterday, the ephemeral modern frock whose glories are so quickly past and gone. How they bring back the merry times and the sad ; no scent of rosemary or of lavender could do so half so poignantly as does this tumbled chiffon gown. For we remember who whispered close beside this little sleeve of lace, whose hand dropped and broke that fan. . . . See this pair of tarnished silver shoes . . . the band is playing " Silver Heels," and the light catches the sheen of the shoes that some one whispers are so appropriate. It is all over now ; the ballroom is dark and silent, and the bats build in the roof, while those shoes will never cover dancing feet again. A little loose earth clings to the heel of one : we walked in the grass that evening, and the moon heard foolish words. . . .

The shimmering blue cloak, with embroidery of writhing dragons, is frayed and soiled now, but it was worn with pride that evening when the band played, and people

danced about the bonfire. There was a woman in poppy red, who looked, in the light of moon and fire, like a flame incarnate. She had beautiful hair, and hopeless, defiant eyes, and she laughed and laughed. . . . I picture her now, though I never knew her, nor why she laughed while her heart ached. Perhaps she now looks at that filmy garment, and weeps into its shabby folds for the memories that cling there yet. . .

I am dreaming again, and dreams are bad things, even when not "snakey." The rain has stopped, and the sun is setting in the heavenly shades of gold and blue and flame that I would give a good deal to capture in chiffon. I will go into the garden, where the rain has beaten the delicate balsams nearly to death. The hard and gorgeous zinnias stand the storm ravages proudly: they are no daintily pretty things to be ravaged by mere rain: I never met any flower so unsympathetic as a zinnia!

LETTER X.

"It rains, and the rain is never weary," as the poet says. Everything else seems to be weary, even the buffaloes are becoming bored. Buffaloes have always seemed to me such awesome, rough-hewn creatures, and I have been calling to mind a legend that explains why this is so. Elizabeth used to tell me, in those far-off days when I wore pinafores and bare knees, the story of how the Devil, who saw what a beautiful creature God had created in the cow, tried his hand at the same business, and gave us the buffalo. So it is easy to understand why buffaloes have none of the suave calm of the cow, but snort and sniff, and toss their heads, and imagine evil every moment of their unquiet lives.

I love cows; they seem to me all that is patient and kindly in the animal world, and they stand as a symbol of maternity. I never was well acquainted with any cows before, but now I like to stand in the yard, and watch the mild-eyed, sweet-breathed creatures licking last year's calf

with precisely the same gentle care as is bestowed on the new arrival who, with its pink nose, and gentle plaintive eyes, bears a grotesque resemblance to Randolph.

Elizabeth used to relate, too, a delightful legend that helps to explain the dog. It seems that God having prepared the clay that was to be moulded into man, left it for a while, and the Devil—who seems to have had less occupation in those days than in these—sauntered past, and saw the stuff. "Man it shall never be!" quoth he, and spat in it! And so, as it was composed of too many good human qualities to be wasted, God formed it into dogs.

I remember it all very distinctly, although I have not thought of it often in these last years—the wide nursery verandah, with the giant bunch of plantains hanging to ripen at the end, and the talking mynah that used to shout at the dogs in uncanny imitation of my father's voice. I can even hear the under-ayah crooning the latest baby to sleep with the time-honoured lullaby about the wild plums that grow in the jungle, or the man that sits by the river catching fish, while I lie back, a little jealous, a little disdainful, in Elizabeth's arms, that I know

very well ought to be holding that newer baby. But when I say to Elizabeth:

"What was that story you used to tell me about the buffaloes, Elizabeth?" Elizabeth looks up from her patient darning of my stockings with her usual remark of:

"No, darlin, you not rememberin,' I never telling you no story about buffaloes. I think the orderly telling you that story; orderly telling you plenty many stories, always."

* * * * *

It makes those days seem very far away, that Elizabeth should forget. My brother does not remember much either; he is not of those with whom the "long, long thoughts" of youth remain insistent.

The Boy splashed over in a motor and a waterproof for the apparent purpose of describing the perils of the road he had braved in order to bring me some books, and to talk a great deal about himself. The Boy's spirits were not in the least affected by the weather. He pranced about the verandah, and addressed personal remarks to Randolph, and babbled of girls and quoted large pieces out of "Salomé," which was one of the books he had brought over.

At tea we, like the Cherub, "puttend"—that is to say, the Boy is taking me out to tea somewhere in town, and we don't mind the rain because we are going later to see the dainty trio of "Amazons," or Pavlova at the Palace. And then there will be supper at the Savoy with everybody very gorgeous in garments that defy description, except in the fashion papers. Or at Romano's where the stage-ladies are all so pretty that I always wonder that men should fall in love with anyone else. Ah! London, grey, gay London, glittering through the early autumn mists, "great flower that opens but at night,"—the Boy and I are two of those who are very sad for you at times. But we drown our sorrow in tea and hot buttered scones, and look out at the blue rain mists that hang over the sodden garden, and tell each other how funny Weedon Gro-smith can look when crawling about the stage with an eider down quilt on his back, which is what he was doing when I saw him last. That is true genius, because the ordinary man might crawl about under a quilt for hours, and no one would laugh except the baby. When the Boy bumbled away in his motor, he left me to the society of "Sa-

loné," a brilliant, if undisciplined, companion for a grey weeping day.

The wonderful rhythm of words in "Salomé" always seems to me like strings of jewels: those jewels that Herod offered Salomé rather than the head of that good man. The three turquoises in a coffer of nacré, the collar of pearls that was like moons chained with rays of silver, the amethysts like wine, the opals "that make sad men's minds," the sapphires in which the sea wanders, and the cups of amber like golden apples. Then the white peacocks with gilded beaks, and feet stained with purple, that strut in pairs amongst the cypresses and the black myrtles. But always Salomé, sullen and vengeful, says merely, "Give me the head of Johanaan," with the same shameless insistence with which she had repeated, "Let me kiss thy mouth, Johanaan." She is a baleful wicked figure, and—for all her beauty, and his covert desire of it—it is easy to understand Herod's sudden, awful cry of "Kill that woman!" that causes Salomé, white and wonderful, to be beaten down by the soldiers.

When, at dusk, the rain ceased, the wind got up and tore over the monotony of sugar-

cane and indigo and rice that I have grown to think of as my "wide prison," like the spell-bound knight in William Morris' poem. There is something strangely appealing in the simple rhythm of the words—

*"Then I should say 'I could not come,
This land was my wide prison, dear.'"*

Shall I say this, I wonder, when there comes—if there comes—the letter that shall recall me to the life I knew once. . . ?

When the postman was eventually blown in on the gale the only letter he brought accused me of writing a novel. This is all wrong. If I could write a novel I could play bridge, or learn Esperanto, or do any of the other things that require concentration and quickness. I could not contemplate my characters long enough to justify a novel. Life never seems to me full of the astounding dramatic things that happen in novels, and on the stage, and in the daily papers. Of course, they do happen, but there are such long intervals of quiet between the big things of life. And life is not laid out in front of us like ribbons on a counter; we get it in such little scrappy bits that it is often difficult to see the pattern. One little short story is about what most of us are worth.

" I lived, I laughed, I loved, and I am lonely "—that is what life means to most people. I often feel that all I really ask of life is not to hurt those I love too much, and to let me retain my capacity for enjoyment to the end. I am as meekly thankful for that capacity as I am for health, or sound limbs, or—Randolph !

LETTER THE LAST.

*And why there was woe in remembrance
Only the woman knew.*

To a Woman,—

Most of us know very well the sensation of relief with which, when travelling, we come out of a long dark tunnel into the sunlight. That is how I feel, now that the hot days, and the rainy days, and the steaming days are gone, and the blue mornings are heavenly fresh, and the nights grow chill towards dawn. There is a delightful sense of activity and promise in these first days of the Indian cold weather. Every one else has emerged from that dark tunnel, too, and lands are weeded, and gardens tidied, and crops are sown. Even the gardener—and gardeners are more averse to work than any other people here—grows almost interested in the subject of English vegetable seeds.

In the evenings the smoke of the burning Indian corn stubble hangs low over the brown lands that still hold the moisture of the rains, and teal fly over to the marshy

lands a little further south. There is magic in the peculiar tearing, swishing sound that heralds the approach of the flock, and even my brother grows enthusiastic at the sight of the black line receding on the horizon, and talks cheerfully of shooting parties, and prospective polo tournaments.

And I—? I have been going about the house, looking at things, and saying to myself in the futile fashion in which one does at these times "The last time—."

I came here to think. I wanted to "sit and look at my life" and decide what I was going to do with it. Was I to resent a wrong so completely and so thoroughly that two lives would have to be re-organized in consequence? Well, I have thought, but all the time I knew, in my heart, that only one end was possible. I am going back, not because I think it right, nor because I think it advisable, nor best in any way, but because, for me, it is the only thing to do. I go because I could not face the unhappiness of not doing so. There is no strength left in me to take up the threads of life, and to weave a new pattern. The one virtue I used to take to myself was pluck, but I am a coward now. One grows

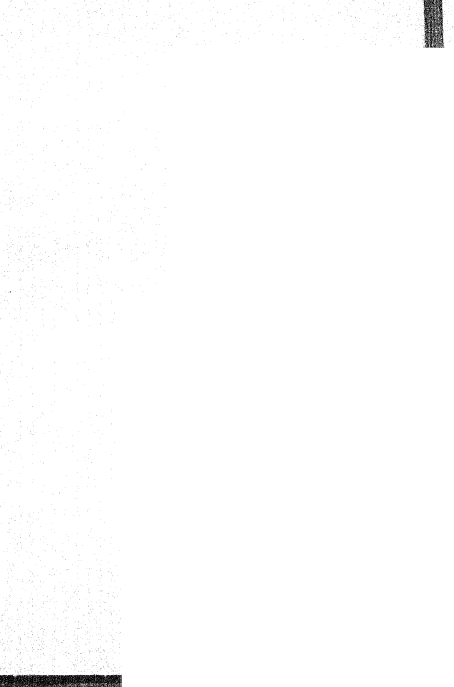
tired as one grows older; grows to desire safety, quiet, good repute, more than adventure, or even than the extreme of happiness. Do not think of me as going back with any resentment or sense of injury in my heart. It seems to me that if women cannot forgive they are not worth very much.

I never told you any thing, and because you were my best friend you never asked. Friends always wait to be told—or they know without being told. Even to you I cannot speak of Randolph's master. In every woman's heart there is a closed door. Whatever her history, her virtues, or her sins, there is one man who is remembered when the others are forgotten.

What makes intimacy between two souls, I wonder? Not words spoken, nor clasp of hands, nor kissing lips; I have come to know how little these may mean. But I know—I have always known—that if I had decided differently, a new life waited somewhere for me.

No use to speak of that. I did not decide. I go because I must.

But though I can give up Randolph's master I cannot give up Randolph. I know now what women feel who go down in sink-



ing ships rather than part from a dog. I am ranking a dog as dearer than a human being, but the feeling I have is that all humans will care for and cherish another human ;—only some will cherish a dumb creature.

Randolph came to me in the nature of a hostage, but he has grown into my life. I could not bear to think of him as ill, or grown old, or as living with strangers, should his master be on service ; or exposed to any of the vicissitudes that are common to dog life. I must keep Randolph as my "share of the world." We will go back to the "sounding town" together, he and I, closing down a chapter of our lives that we both now know to have been a not unhappy one.

THE END.